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ABSTRACT

The thesis presented in this paper is that school failure among minority subgroups is related to the nature, characteristics, and function of public schooling as well as to the social structural position of the subgroups of which these children are members. An overview of some ethnographic studies of schools and the process of schooling is provided to illustrate the structural-functional orientation predominant in this body of literature. The paper is composed of two sections. The first section discusses concepts and theoretical orientations underlying the argument for a more structural, functional, and systematic approach to accounting for this problem of differential school outcomes. In this section, the focus is on a consideration of the nature of schools, the relationship of schools to social structure, and some predominant sociocultural functions of schools. The second section discusses some representative research on the actual school experiences of children from subordinate groups. Here the focus is on the manner in which schooling functions to perpetuate patterns of subgroup relationships predominant in the larger society via both latent and manifest structuring of differential classroom experiences. (RM)

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Schools and Schooling: Anthropological Approaches

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Norris Brock Johnson

Men at some time are masters of
Their fate: The fault, Dear
Brutus, is not in our Stars, But
In ourselves, That we are underlings.

From *Julius Caesar*,
by William Shakespeare

Intervention into, as well as the prevention of, disproportionate and differential rates of school failure will not be successful without more adequate theories, concepts, and data on the nature and characteristics of school environments themselves. In seeking to maximize the developmental potential of children, it is of utmost importance to focus attention on a consideration of the structure and function of the school environments in which children spend a major portion of their most formative years.

The problem before us is accounting for the disproportionate school failure, as well as disproportionate *potential* for school failure, of groups of children exhibiting no physiological basis for such differential outcomes. The thesis presented in this chapter is that differential school performance is, in part, related to the nature, characteristics, and function of public schooling as well as to the social structural position of the subgroups of which these children are members. Differential rates of school failure are only another outcome of the *structural inequality* reflected in characteristic patterns of subgroup relationship vis-à-vis strategic resources, such as schooling, within the society as a whole.

We must ask, "What are some of the *functions* of educational stratification and differential school outcomes?" This chapter departs from psychological and psychogenic explanations of school success and failure. At the group level, the causes of and influences on differential school outcomes are here claimed to be more a matter of the sociocultural and historical nature and character of schools and the process of schooling than a matter of the biopsychological characteristics of individual students. By egocentrically focusing on individuals, biopsychological theoretical orientations can-

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not effectively resolve problems of differential educational experiences among particular groups of children (Burger, 1972). In addition, for the purpose of discussing school success and failure, the problem group under study remains vaguely defined. Are we concerned with the children of the poor, of the "disadvantaged," of "minorities"? The linguistic search seems to be for criteria by which to more effectively conceptualize groups of children characterized by poor school performance. What these terms share is an *implicit* awareness of systemic relationship. In his ethnography of a Chicano and black neighborhood in southern California, Ogbu (1974) coined the phrase "subordinate minority" to describe the relationship of these particular subgroups and the dominant Anglo (white) subgroup. The phrase *subordinate minority* effectively connotes the structural relationships *between* subgroups which, Ogbu argues, influence the school experiences and outcomes of children *within* each subgroup. The concern here is with accounting for disproportionate rates of school failure among the children of what will be termed subordinate minority subgroups (Fuchs, 1969a; Spindler, 1973).

This chapter is an overview of some predominant ethnographic studies of schools and the process of schooling. The ethnographic approach centers on the nonparticipant, naturalistic observation of human behavior and is quite effective in describing actual school situations as well as in accounting for the functional relationship of public schools with other subsystems in our society and culture (Siegel, 1955; Burnett, 1970; Roberts, 1970; Wax, Diamond, and Gearing, 1971). Contemporary studies in educational anthropology have generated hypotheses and case studies germane to accounting for persistent school failure among children from subordinate subgroups (Comitas, 1973; Modiano, 1973; Spindler, 1973; Burnett, Gordon, and Gormley, 1974). The intent of this chapter is to convey the structural-functional orientation predominant in this body of literature. As specifically addressed to child development researchers, this chapter reports some primary theoretical and conceptual orientations and conclusions generated in the ethnographic study of schools and schooling. Suggested here is the applicability of anthropological concepts and methods to the study of contemporary problems in education.

The chapter is composed of two sections. The first section discusses concepts and theoretical orientations underlying the argument for a more structural, functional, and systemic approach to accounting for this problem of differential school outcomes. In this section, the focus is on a consideration of the nature of schools, the relationship of schools to social structure, and some predominant sociocultural functions of schools. The second section discusses some representative research on the actual school experiences of children from subordinate subgroups. Here, the focus is on the manner in which schooling functions to perpetuate patterns of subgroup relationship predominant in the larger society via both latent and manifest structuring of differential classroom experiences.

STUDYING SCHOOL OUTCOMES: A STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

In seeking to account for persistent subgroup differences in school outcomes, the predominant (egocentric) focus in child development has been on the physiological, cognitive, and psychological study of individual children. As elaborated by Ogbu (1978), this bias is as much cultural as it is professional. Ogbu argues that the

preoccupation with the characteristics of individual children, as well as their immediate home environments, is reflective of the degree to which child development research shares the characteristically American belief in concepts of self-determinism, free will, and the unimpeded responsibility of individuals for their own success or failure in life (McGiffert, 1963; Hsu, 1972). This particular bias has inhibited child development research from more fully exploring the historical, social, cultural, and structural factors influencing school, as well as life, outcomes.

The sociocentric concept of structure is useful in considering the part-to-whole relationship of education and society. The concepts of structure and system are common to the natural and physical sciences. Both organic and nonorganic phenomena are approached as whole systems composed of functionally integrated and structurally interrelated parts. Rather than considered in isolation, particular aspects of phenomena are studied in *part-to-whole* relationship.

"Structure" refers to those abstract, deduced patterns of relationship forming a systematic recurrent arrangement providing a formative framework and context for ongoing human behavior (Vogt, 1960). Radcliffe-Brown (1940) conceptualizes *social* structure as the metaphorical links existing between people (or groups of people) characterizing recurrent patterns of ongoing social relationship. Social structure is the characteristic pattern of subgroup role and status relationship within society (Linton, 1936). It is important to underscore that this concept of structure does not refer to individuals. The concept of structure *is abstracted from* the specific behavior patterns of human relationship. Metaphorically, the concern is not so much with the play itself as it is with the nature of the different stages on which the same play might be variously performed as well as with the manner in which each stage differentially affects the performance of the play. The concept of structure is heuristic. Structure can be employed to clarify those macrolevel patterns of subgroup relationships functionally organizing ongoing microlevel patterns of social relationship. In seeking to explain persistent subgroup differences in educational experiences, the concept of structure offers an alternative to biological and environmental models. It is the characteristic pattern of relationship between subgroups in our society that structure the manner in which the educational play is variously performed.

Further conceptual problems involve "environment." In accounting for school failure, child development research predominately focuses on the home and on the parent, especially the mother, as environment. A more structural conception considers the systemic interrelationships *within society itself* to be an influencing environment (Kimball, 1967; Fuchs, 1969b; Herriott and Hodgkins, 1969; Horton, 1971). Family behavior and household composition are not constructed in a vacuum but are influenced by systemic factors quite apart from these localized spheres (Valentine, 1968; Leacock, 1970, 1971). "Environment" ought to be conceptualized as the systemic relationship of subordinate subgroups to the society as a whole. The distinction between social and natural environments must remain clear. Phenotypic adaptation to natural environments assumes no intervening constraints. On the other hand, social environments possess human-made structures mediating the adaptive potential of individuals. Biologically "fit" individuals may or may not develop their potential dependent on the manner in which a particular society is structured. In a social environment, the relationship between genetic potential and phenotypic expression is

not direct but mediated by culture itself. Culture and society influence the nature of human environments; thus, cultures and societies influence the expression of human potential. Subgroup differences in educational outcomes are not so much a problem of individual biology or immediate home environment as they are a matter of the structural constraints on the development of potential. The structure of society as a supralocal environment influences the nature and characteristics of local environments such as school systems and family patterns.

From this vantage, it is not so much a matter of children from subordinate subgroups disproportionately failing school as it is a matter of the manner in which public schools disproportionately fail children from subordinate subgroups (Becker, 1961; Leacock, 1969; Collier, 1973; Illich, 1973). In a stratified society such as our own, it is virtually impossible to consider the behavior of individuals in any subgroup without reference to the relative positioning and ranking of that subgroup within society as a whole. To a great extent, the behavior of individuals is influenced by their membership in subgroups differentially ranked in a stratified hierarchy (Cohen, 1970, 1971). All stratified societies are composed of superordinate and subordinate subgroups having differential life chances in the national society (Plotnicov and Tuden, 1970). Education is only one arena for the playing out of the consequences of *structural inequality*. As a consequence of structural inequality, the entire society benefits from the fact that different children receive different educational experiences (Schwartz, 1975). In *The Next Generation*, Ogbu (1974) argues that persistent school failure on the part of children from subordinate subgroups is an adaptation to their structural position in society. The Burgerside (pseudonym) neighborhood in Stockton, California, is characterized as having a patron-client pattern of relationship between Mexican-American and Anglo-American subgroups. Rather than attributing differential school success and failure to be an individual, developmental, or biopsychological problem, Ogbu assumes a more structural stance. Persistent school failure is an adaptation to a structure of caste-like inequality already recognized by the children. Viewing the low status occupations, prestige, and status of their elders, children from subordinate subgroups simply stop trying to achieve school success because school success does not seem to result in equal social success. The argument is that these children correctly perceive that, as a group, they will have limited opportunities to benefit from their educational efforts. This structural approach considers the influence of the social environment on school performance. In accounting for differential school performance, Ogbu's work (1974, 1978) is quite valuable in that he correctly emphasizes a consideration of structure and context rather than the more idiosyncratic behavior of individual children.

That an egocentric focus on individual children is of little utility in accounting for broad social and structural problems, such as differential school performance, does not mean that individual differences in ability do not influence school performance. All children are not expected to experience the same level of school achievement. The argument here is that, *as a group*, children from subordinate subgroups experience disproportionate school failure *despite individual ability* (Gladwin, 1970; Lacey, 1973). Ascribed membership in either superordinate or subordinate subgroups affects one's school experience (Lacey, 1970; Fischer, 1973). Randomly elevating the IQ scores of selected children will not alter the characteristic stratified pattern of relation-

ship existing between superordinate and subordinate subgroups (Valentine 1968; Baratz and Baratz, 1970). This strategy will not effectively countervail the educational implications and constraints social position poses for children from subordinate subgroups. As based on egocentric paradigms, prevailing intervention strategies seek to adapt these children to school environments themselves functionally reinforcing structural inequality. Henry (1966) views schooling itself as posing mental health problems for children from subordinate subgroups. In and of themselves, the enculturation processes latently exhibited by school culture are shown to stimulate significant psychological problems. By focusing research attention on the nature and characteristics of school environments, one acknowledges that this problem of subgroup differences in school performance demands a restructuring of the school context in which education occurs rather than an exclusive focus on the restructuring of individual children.

Schools and Stratified Society

Through discernible processes of sociocultural transmission, patterns of child socialization (educational systems) are functionally integrated with and related to the structure of the type of society in which they occur (Spindler, 1959; Beals, Spindler, and Spindler, 1973). Socialization involves the exchange of information for the purpose of training children to assume extant roles and statuses within society (Goodenough, 1965; Williams, 1972; Schwartz, 1975). A society's pattern of sociocultural transmission is functionally integrated with the structure of society itself. What children learn (or do not learn) and are taught (or not taught) is not something to be considered apart from the structure of society. Thus arises the importance of considering the *structure* of our society in relationship to discussions of subgroup differences in educational performance. Cohen (1970) notes that each society has its own characteristic pattern for the transmission and perpetuation of its culture. Similar to the subsystems of religion, law, and economy, the educational sphere of a society must be congruent with the total way of life of the group and its social structure. *In a stratified society, the national education subsystem must also be expected to exhibit stratification* (Shimahara and Scrupski, 1975). It is important to view differences in educational outcomes in terms of the structure of the type of society in which they occur. Only stratified societies exhibit persistent intrasociety subgroup differences in socialization experiences and educational outcomes. Apart from age and sex considerations, all societies cannot be said to so differentiate teaching and learning experiences (Williams, 1972). This concept of structural inequality is most important in accounting for the differential school outcomes of children from subordinate subgroups in our society.

By definition, stratification is the organization of a society on the basis of structural inequality in access to and control over strategic resources. Fried (1960) defines socially strategic resources as those items, such as food and shelter, necessary for physical survival. Furthermore, a state is an organization for the management and maintenance of social stratification and structural inequality (Adams, 1966; Fried, 1967; Caniero, 1970). Stratified state societies (such as our own) are best considered as a form of social organization functionally contributing to the maintenance of structural, subgroup inequality in access to and control over strategic resources. It was only with the evolution of stratified societies that there came to be persistent structural

inequality in access to basic strategic resources among the subgroups within society. In stratified societies, members of the same sex and equivalent age status do not have equal access to strategic resources. The deprivation of one subgroup might *not* affect the life chances or life course of individuals in other subgroups. In stratified societies, access to strategic social resources (such as education) is inhibited in part by differentially ascribing advantage to certain subgroups and ascribing disadvantage to other subgroups (Berreman, 1960, 1972; Dollard, 1949).

What we term "schools" are found only in stratified societies organized into states (Cohen, 1970, 1971). Schools evolved as a result of a state's adaptation to pressures engendered by participation in a civilizational network with other states; as educational and socialization institutions, schools developed only in those states in civilizational relationship with other states. One of the pressures engendered by participation in civilizational networks was demand for cross-state communication. Elites, who have always been first to be schooled, functioned to maintain and mediate the networks of relationship between states. Initially, the stratification inherent in the structure of state societies was reinforced in that only children from elite subgroups actually attended school. As formal schooling diffused among the commoners, characteristic differences were maintained between common and elite schools; these latent and manifest differences functioned to reinforce the inequality inherent in stratified social systems (Singleton, 1973). In the nature of their articulation with social structure, all public schools are not alike. Local schools exist within stratified hierarchies comprising national educational systems (Belshaw, 1970; Horton, 1971; Wax and Wax, 1971b). Even with the advent of mass education, the organization of public schooling within state societies remains manifestly and latently stratified (Stephenson, 1957; Shimahara and Scrupski, 1975). Not only access to schools in general but access to certain types of schools in particular has always been a reflex of the differential distribution of strategic resources in stratified societies. It must not be assumed that the school is an institution unrelated to other aspects of society and culture. The school is a small society, and the school is functionally related to the wider society. Both manifestly and latently, schools reinforce stratification in that they are functionally integrated with structural inequality (Parsons, 1959; Ortiz, 1972). Schools and differential schooling do not so much cause stratification as reinforce structural inequality. That schools unequally distribute social success and failure, social competence and incompetence, and social advantage and disadvantage only means that they are effectively functioning (Katz, 1971).

In our contemporary society, children from subordinate subgroups exhibit differential school performance. This is, in part, related to this structural relationship between social stratification and schooling. Persistent subordinate subgroup differences in school performance and school outcomes are related to stratified access to schooling as well as to differential school experiences. In a stratified educational hierarchy in a stratified society some children are structurally mandated to fail and others to succeed. A priori, structural inequality negates meritocracy of equal educational opportunity. The crucial point here is that, *quite apart from any consideration of individual ability or intelligence*, stratified societies will structurally limit the access of subordinate subgroups to valued social resources, such as adequate housing, air, water, education, and food, as well as to the information and work necessary to secure them. In a stratified society *native capabilities do not predict the social role and status*

of individuals. In a stratified society there is, in fact, an inverse correlation between the numbers of valued roles and statuses and the number of individuals capable of filling them (Fried, 1967). Especially in situations of mass public schooling, in functional preparation for stratified roles and statuses, children from high status social subgroups or superordinate minorities are to be expected to disproportionately attend high status schools where they are taught and learn categories of information, knowledge, and skill different from those taught in the case of children predominately from low status social subgroups or subordinate minorities. The second half of this chapter, concerning ethnographic approaches to a study of schooling, illustrates some of the latent ways in which this structural mandate is carried out at the classroom level. The argument here is not to be confused with that of Jencks (1972) or Coleman (1959, 1966). These reports conclude that public schools can little influence a child's achievement; families, not schools, significantly affect achievement. The connotation is that there is little rationale for school intervention. The position taken in this chapter is that schools and school outcomes are structurally linked to other spheres in the society—including family structure. Because of functional integration, a change in a linked segment of the system will produce corresponding changes in the others. Herriott and Hodgkins (1969) note that only changes in social organization will be effective in changing schools serving subordinate subgroups. School intervention ought not to be so concerned with making children "equal" as with structuring meritorious educational situations for the development of individual potential. Such efforts are sterile unless accompanied by greater stress on meritocracy in the wider society (Ogbu, 1978).

Stratification in the educational subsystem assumes that different kinds of knowledge, information, and skill will be transmitted in different types of schools and differentially distributed to children from various superordinate and subordinate subgroups within classrooms (Rist, 1970; Rosenfeld, 1971). The stratified nature of schools and schooling affects the development of social competence.

Development of Social Competence

Competence is used here to mean the ability and the opportunity to effectively function in, contribute to, and carry out the traditions of one's society. Within societies, the goal of socialization processes is to develop new members competent to assume extant roles and statuses. The development of social competence involves ability, motivation, and access to as well as an understanding of specialized competency-bearing information. Finally, one must have the opportunity to perform competent behaviors. The performance of competence is not synonymous with the ability to perform or with the possession of the information and skills necessary for competent performance. As Goodenough (1976) explains, the development of social competence involves 1) necessary levels of mental comprehension, 2) a perception of self and of goals making the development of comprehension and skills seem appropriate and desirable, 3) freedom from emotional blocks in relation to the skills and knowledge in question, and 4) access to situations in which there are opportunities to rehearse acquired skills as well as the opportunity to receive feedback (guidance) until proficiency is achieved.

With regard to differential school outcomes, these are important considerations. An initial concern is that native ability is only one aspect involved in the development of social competence and, by extension, competent school performance. The predomi-

nant focus in developmental research on school competence has tended to focus on ability—the relative presence or absence of the mental states and conditions necessary to competence—to the extent that competence has come to synonymize ability. Goodenough (1976) reminds us that, *given ability*, the absence of the three other relevant domains inhibits the development and expression of competence. An analogy can be made between the *structure* of a symphony, the *ability* of the musicians to interpret and express those structural principles, and the display and *performance*, either competently or incompetently rendered, of that information and skill. Ogbu's work (1974, 1978) stresses that children from subordinate subgroups often perceive that attainment of school competence bears little relationship to life outcomes.

Finally, the crucial word here is access. One must also have access to the skills and information by which competence is defined as well as to situations for the appropriate performance of competent behavior. *Regardless of ability*, one cannot become competent without access to specialized information. From this perspective, it is useful to consider a certain category of information, competency-bearing information, as that category of information (such as reading and writing) necessary to social survival and to a high quality of life. Especially in stratified societies, *certain categories of knowledge and information are strategic resources*. In a highly specialized society, differential access to socially valued information and knowledge has a life impact as great as differential access to material resources. Along with the more obvious material resources utilized by various societies as adaptive strategies, an awareness of, access to, and control over the information and situations necessary to the development of competence are resources. As a form of power, competence is rarely freely distributed. By definition for stratified societies, competence is a socially valuable but scarce resource. To fashion a genetic metaphor, a society can be conceived as possessing a bounded information pool. Do all children have access to this information? In what manner is the information distributed? The distribution of competency-bearing information in a society is interwoven with other mechanisms of socialization. In a stratified society, it is to be expected that the distribution of competency-bearing information also be stratified (Inkeles, 1966). Structural inequality in education differentiates the socialization experience. There are significant constraints on the kinds of information distributed to particular groups of children in public schools.

Ethnographic examples in the following section illustrate that *apart from ability*, individual children from subordinate subgroups are disproportionately ascribed social incompetence reinforced by differential access to the information, skills, and situations necessary for the expression and development of competence. In a stratified society, to be competent in one subgroup does not predict competence by the standards of another subgroup. Burnett (1976) posits that competence is not so much a matter of individual ability or motivation as it is a matter of who has the power, such as public school teachers, to define and judge competence. This is to say that, apart from individual instances of physiological dysfunction, it ought to be assumed that children from subordinate subgroups possess competence. The question is not so much whether most of these children are capable of learning as it is why do most of them not learn. The problem here is that subgroup competence, developed as a matter of course, has little selective advantage in the larger society. It is impossible for any human child to be "culturally deprived" or "culturally disadvantaged" (Wax and Wax, 1971a; Valentine,

1972). In part, then, problems of competency learning on the part of children from subordinate subgroups in stratified societies ought to be approached as exercises in acculturation (Thomas and Wahrhaftig, 1971; Johnson, 1977).

Varying by type of society and characteristic pattern of subgroup relationship, the development of competence is a structural problem. Viewing competency-bearing information and situations as property, we have a structural framework for studying the manner in which information and skills are differentially distributed in school classrooms. Subsumed within the general concept of enculturation, competence involves teaching and learning the rules of a situation well enough to behave appropriately. Whatever constrains the free distribution of competency-bearing information reduces effectively the teaching and learning of competence. A more profitable approach to resolving specific problems of student competency involves researching those factors and structures *inhibiting* the transmission of competency-bearing information and *limiting* its effective display and performance.

Child development research efforts ought to include studies aimed at detecting those boundaries, limits, and gatekeeping mechanisms inhibiting access to competency-bearing information. The prevention of disproportionate school failure among subordinate subgroups ought to focus attention on the structural/functional relationship of the organization of schooling to the organization of the society as a whole.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO SCHOOLING

A structural-functional approach to schools and schooling relates educational processes to other subsystems within society as a whole. An ethnographic approach to schools and schooling focuses on the first-hand observation of educational process in naturalistic settings (Siegel, 1955, 1974, Burnett, 1970; Khleif, 1971). This section illustrates the preceding conceptual framework by reference to several significant ethnographic studies accounting for differential teaching and learning situations in public school classrooms contributing to differential subgroup outcomes.

Although anthropologists researching educational process primarily have concerned themselves with the structural relationship between schools and their local communities (Singleton, 1967; Wolcott, 1967; Sindell, 1969), this section reports ethnographic studies of actual classroom processes in relationship to national rather than local contexts. The premise here is that public schooling is a mechanism for culture transmission (Singleton, 1974) and that public schooling is structurally and functionally aligned with national as well as with various local contexts (Dreeben, 1968; Cohen, 1970, 1971; Safa, 1971; Wax and Wax, 1971b; Johnson, 1980). The following ethnographic research briefly illustrates the manner in which the process of public schooling replicates, especially, status and role patterns of subgroup relationship in our national society.

Subordinate Subgroup Classroom Experiences: Cross-Cultural Studies

Although the educational problems of lower status and lower income blacks have predominated in the literature on schools and schooling, it is important to underscore the fact that the differential educational performance of Native Americans, Chicanos,

and Puerto Ricans is also a logical outcome of subordinate subgroup position within society (Ogbu, 1978).

In their ethnographic study of Cherokee reservation schooling, Dumont and Wax (1969) focused on the "clash of cultures" in the classroom forcing students, as McDermott and Gospodinoff (1976) found in urban schools, to choose between Anglo norms and their traditional culture. The argument here is that cross-cultural classroom situations force students to acculturate to what McDermott (1974) terms a "host" culture. In such situations, school failure is, in part, a result of students opting to retain their parent culture. Specifically, "nonresponsiveness" in the reservation classroom is interpreted as one manner in which students protect themselves from cultural assault. In comparison with traditional educational processes, reservation schooling is viewed as an Anglo intrusion. Dumont and Wax (1969) emphasize that peer pressure in classrooms further forces students to choose parent rather than school society. Paralleling Ogbu's (1974) findings, Dumont and Wax (1969) have stated that Cherokee students do not believe that success in school will have a differential impact on the quality and character of their lives on the reservation. Like the Chicano and black students Ogbu (1974) interviewed, these Cherokee perceive their stratified relationship to the superordinate Anglo subgroup as affecting their school experiences. Because there is little perceived correlation between school and social success, the quest for academic excellence is seen as a futile effort (Illich, 1973).

In her study of the Oglala Sioux, Wax (1967) found that problems of school failure and poor academic performance parallel those of blacks, Chicanos, and poor Anglos. On the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, Sioux live in cabins without heat, water, electricity, or telephone. These are the most impoverished people on the reservation. In contrast with more urbanized and acculturated Sioux, schools predominately classify the Pine Ridge children as "culturally deprived." As based on a culture-conflict model, Wax takes us into the Pine Ridge classrooms to show how different groups of Sioux children are differentially treated by teachers. Wax views the problem of disproportionate school failure among the poorer Sioux as one of acculturation. Those Sioux who do not conform to and adopt the Anglo culture of the school experience almost inevitably fail in school. Wax (1967) claims that these Sioux children, primarily males, are "pushed out" of schools because of subcultural rather than academic reasons. Those Sioux children who do (marginally) succeed in school are characterized by their peers as lacking independent thought, spontaneity, and creativity—all highly prized Sioux traits. More specifically, Wax (1967) is saying that the culture of the school conflicts with the culture of the Sioux (Wax, Wax, and Dumont, 1964). Fuchs and Havighurst (1973) note that Native American children parallel Anglo children on reading scores only during the first two grades. During third grade, the reading scores of Anglo children accelerate while the reading scores of Native American children decelerate. Paralleling Ogbu's (1974) interpretation of similar situations among blacks and Chicanos, Fuchs and Havighurst (1973) conclude that it is during the third grade that Native American (and black) children begin to perceive the implications of their subordinate status and role, lose self-confidence, and deny motivations for school success. In this regard, Ogbu's (1974) ethnographic research further explains that, for particular groups of subordinate status children, school failure is a logical outcome of education in a stratified society.

This educational problem of persistent school failure is common to children from subordinate minority subgroups in other cultures (Ramcharan-Crowley, 1961; King, 1967; Modiano, 1973). In an ethnographic study of contemporary Inuit (Eskimo) education, Collier (1973) employed video recordings of classroom processes to determine the influence of teacher and student interaction styles and patterns of nonverbal communication on academic performance. Collier relates the differential processes of education in classrooms to the pattern of Inuit/Anglo relationships in the wider society. In the classroom, Anglo teachers interact with Inuit children similar to the manner in which Anglos interact with Inuit in broader social contexts. Because of the stratified structure of Inuit/Anglo subgroup relationships, Collier concludes that formal education for the Inuit neither prepares them for participation in Anglo society nor prepares them for participation in traditional Inuit society. For the Inuit, schooling is a process of acculturation into an Anglo society. The effectiveness of schooling is limited by the stratified, subordinate status of the Inuit as a subgroup. Whether in the classroom or in the employment sector, the result is marginal and peripheral involvement with Anglo society *yet* profound cultural and social alienation from traditional life-ways. Quite similar to Leacock's (1969) research, Collier claims that schooling functions to provide the acculturating Inuit just enough education for subordinate social status and roles within Anglo society yet little preparation or training for more substantial participation. Again, it is not so much that Inuit children fail Anglo schools as it is a problem of the school's structural alignment with stratified patterns of subgroup relationship. Collier's video analysis of classroom processes illustrates differences in teacher/student interaction patterns in predominately Anglo as opposed to predominately Inuit schools.

Further bearing upon this matter of differential educational experiences is Leacock's (1969) comparative study of four public school systems in the United States. In seeking to better understand the antecedents of school success and school failure, Leacock compared a predominately white middle income school, a predominately black middle income school, a predominately white lower income school, and a predominately black lower income school. Leacock's ethnographic study of respective classrooms in each school focused on decision-making processes among groups of fifth-grade students. In the predominately white middle income classroom, students were observed to exercise leadership skills that Leacock posits as common to the more professional and high status occupations and roles in our society. Students, for example, practiced question-and-answer protocol and appropriate deference to higher authority. In both the predominately lower income white and black classrooms, students were observed to be presented with significantly *fewer* opportunities to practice similar skills and behaviors. Most interestingly, Leacock noted that in the predominately middle income black classroom, students were presented with roles and tasks germane to participation in the wider society, but, paralleling Collier's (1973) findings, these roles and tasks emphasized partial and marginal rather than significant responsibility. For example, students would be assigned leadership roles, but these "leadership" roles were devoid of actual responsibility. A student would be assigned to "lead" a group project yet be monitored by the teacher. In the predominately white middle income school, the teacher did not similarly monitor the leadership role. In general, classrooms attended by the children from superordinate subgroups were

shown to emphasize such traits as initiative and decision making while the classrooms attended by the children from subordinate subgroups emphasized such traits as poise and demeanor. Leacock (1969) concluded that these differences in decision-making routines and practices are functionally related to the stratified subgroup pattern of relationship in the wider society. The social relationship patterns in the classroom mirror those in the larger society. Practice in decision making is functional for children from superordinate subgroups while a lack of practice in decision making is functional for socially subordinate and marginal statuses. Leacock claims that the unique interactional pattern in the predominately middle income black school was due to the fact that, for the most part, middle income blacks occupy lower level competitive and salary niches than do similarly schooled whites. Participation occurs but the participation rarely involves full leadership responsibility. Leacock claims that this pattern is subtly manifested regardless of the socioeconomic status of the schools attended by children from subordinate subgroups.

Classroom Social Organization and School Success

The ethnographic research of Ray McDermott (1974, 1977, 1978; McDermott and Gospodinoff, 1979) at Rockefeller University, is most important to this discussion of school success and failure. McDermott adopts a structural stance in illustrating the manner in which school failure is related to the stratification aspects of classroom social organization. McDermott functionally relates the stratified social organization of classroom processes to the stratified organization of the national society. Differential school success and failure enhance the replication of extant stratified social roles and statuses. School failure, in part, is a predictable outcome of classroom social organization. McDermott ethnographically describes classroom processes deemed responsible for this functional alignment of education and society.

Failure to learn to read is conceptualized as socialization into the politics of stratified classrooms. Subordinate status has to be learned, and reading failure is part of the definition of subordinate status. Children learn to achieve subordinate status through the nature and characteristics of their interactions with teachers and peers. McDermott (1974) argues that school success is dependent upon high levels of transfer, from teacher to student, of strategic competency-bearing information. The hypothesis here is that a significant number of what are usually described as "reading disabilities" represent the effects of *situationally induced student inattention patterns*, themselves logical outcomes of the social organizational characteristics of public school classrooms. Reading failure is a *logical* outcome of the structural and interactional nature of stratified classrooms. For subordinate minority students, not learning to read, for example, is a response to structural pressures for stratified roles and differential educational outcomes (Comitas 1973; Inkeles, 1966; Stephenson, 1957). "Reading disabilities" are products of the manner in which classroom constituents employ categories for interaction and information exchange producing statuses and identities replicating those in the larger society. Persistent school failure for these students becomes a peer group goal contributing to the regeneration of the subordinate social status positions and roles of their parents.

Effects of Teacher Expectation and Interaction In an ethnographic study of subordinate minority children in predominantly superordinate school classrooms,

McDermott (1978) elaborates on Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) concept of self-fulfilling prophecy: student performance is related to teacher expectation. The argument is that if children are not expected to learn, teachers will spend less interactional time with them. Based on culture transmission theory, the learning of competency-bearing information cannot occur devoid of dyadic interaction between teacher and student. Again, the development of competence is based on the dyadic exchange of strategic information. Anything impeding the formation of dyadic grouping and interchange impedes the development of educational competence. McDermott (1978) claims the manner in which students are differentially grouped in classroom reading clusters has a direct impact on the amount of time a teacher is literally able to spend with them. Paralleling Talbert's (1970) findings, the point is that the spatial and temporal aspects of customary classroom social organization affect the differential teaching and learning experiences of students.

In an interactional study of constituent behavior in an urban classroom, Talbert (1970) found that the development of student competence centered on the degree of achieved teacher interaction. Talbert notes that the spatially stratified nature of classroom social organization influences differential school success and failure. In the classrooms in her study sample, Talbert detected three student groupings differing by quantity and quality of interaction with the teacher. Benefiting from near instantaneous feedback from the teacher, one group of students was characterized by proximity to the teacher and a location near the center of the classroom. A second clustering of students "vicariously learn" through passive interaction with the teacher via the first student clustering. Finally, there was a more distant clustering of students operating on the periphery of the classroom; this group had the least amount of interaction time with the teacher. Talbert concludes that the differential learning and adaptation occurring in classrooms is a function of one's spatial placement in the classroom itself. Similarly, McDermott (1974, 1977, 1978) stresses that there are significant differences in the classroom behavior patterns of each (ranked) reading group because the children in each reading group are structurally provided spatially different classroom environments.

Stratification by Reading Group As based on the video taping of activity patterns in different reading groups, McDermott (1978) ironically notes that children in the "low" reading group entered school with less developed reading skills, received one-third less teacher time as compared with the "high" reading group, and thus progressively fell further behind in the development of reading competence. In terms of the time teachers spend with them, McDermott illustrates the manner in which different groups of children were handled differently. As an outcome, each group of students achieved different levels of competence. In the "low" reading groups, there was less dyadic exchange of the strategic information necessary for reading competence. Receiving less teacher time, we can say that these subordinate subgroup children received less opportunity to display whatever competence they might have achieved. For McDermott, the problem is not *just* differential teacher attitudes. Again, the structure of the process of schooling (differential reading groups in time and space) creates unequal learning environments. Differential reading groups are an inferred demand of literate societies. Thus, it is the macrolevel demands of the wider society that are associated with microlevel situations of educational inequality in the classroom. McDermott stresses that teachers are under considerable pressure to sort

and interact with students on the basis of reading ability. Specifically, McDermott views the competition and work organization in the wider society as reinforcing student sorting processes in the classroom. In part, the cycle continues because of competitive pressure for reading competence.

McDermott (1977) again stresses the importance of dyadic teacher/student interaction to successful school experiences and the development of educational competence. Here, he speaks of "trusting" relationships between teacher and student as being crucial to successful student outcomes. With students from subordinate subgroups, the point is that the stratified social organization of classrooms, as well as previously mentioned competitive pressures, work against the formation of "trusting" relationships. Structurally, the focus here is on the networks of relationship between teachers and students. Patterns of relationship, here influenced by classroom social organization, influence differential student outcomes.

McDermott (1977) provides the example of Rosa, a first-grade student in a "low" reading group. Day after day, Rosa is passed by for a turn to read. Examining film of the interaction between Rosa and the teacher, McDermott notes that Rosa often calls for a turn to read while looking away from the teacher; or she might wait until the teacher is about to call on another child before raising her hand. The teacher organizes turn taking at random. Rosa is not expected to read in turn. In effect, Rosa avoids being called on to read, presumably because she does not read very well. On the other hand, the teacher does not call on Rosa presumably because Rosa does not read very well. At the end of the second grade, Rosa was sent to a special school for "slow learners."

Teacher-Student Relational Struggles In another article, McDermott and Gospodinoff (1979) focus on the educational impact of the *political* relationship of teachers to students from subordinate subgroups. The assumption here is that when communicative and interactional differences between teachers and subordinate children become irremedial, there are political reasons for this being so. In again focusing on the specific problem of why children from subordinate subgroups disproportionately fail school, McDermott and Gospodinoff conclude that most of these children spend an inordinate amount of classroom time engaged in relational battles with the teacher. Ethnographic analysis is based on a first-grade classroom of subordinate subgroup children in a predominately superordinate, suburban classroom. The evidence of reading problems among the children from subordinate subgroups is apparent. The authors note that subjective teacher evaluations were involved in assigning Italian and Jewish children to the top reading groups and blacks and Puerto Ricans to the bottom reading groups. Employing video tape, McDermott and Gospodinoff recorded the spatial grouping and interaction patterns of each student group with the teacher. New data here showed that the top reading group was never interrupted or disturbed. If students from the bottom reading group had a question, they were dissuaded from interrupting the teacher while she was with the top group. Conversely, top reading group students were permitted to periodically interrupt the bottom reading group to ask the teacher questions. Furthermore, students at the top reading table were seen to read in turn. There was a firm organizational pattern and firm directions for reading procedure. At the bottom reading table, students not not read in turn. There were no discernible directions or protocol for reading procedure. Students were seen to jockey for teacher

attention and reading time; quite literally, there was more time spent in trying to gain reading time than was seen in the top reading group.

McDermott and Gospodinoff (1979) stress that the teacher in question was excellent. The problem is not that something is wrong with the children or that teachers conspire to fail students. Instead, attention is drawn to the organization of the reading procedure and the nature of the classroom context in which competency-bearing information is transmitted. Teachers are under pressure to produce test-competent students. A priori, "slow" readers pose problems. Because the teacher found them "difficult to work with," several of the Puerto Rican students from the bottom reading group eventually were sent to specialized (remedial) schools. From a subordinate subgroup student's point of view, the often arbitrary assignment to "low" and stigmatized groups prompts frustration and rebellion (Wax, 1967). As opposed to spending time learning to read, students faced with inattention and information gaps spend considerable time trying to relate to the stratified structure of the classroom. Relational struggles replace reading struggles. Not perceiving a "trusting" relationship, a successful teacher/student context for teaching and learning is not established. Because of the specific time and space problems briefly described, for these children from subordinate subgroups, learning to read becomes an organizational impossibility. The stratified organization of reading groups in the classroom, the differential teaching and learning characterizing each, results in the bottom group falling farther and farther behind in reading competence. The problem is not that these children are "different" but that perceived differences become politically significant. School failure is a *rational outcome* of the stratified environment in which education takes place. McDermott and Gospodinoff (1979) emphasize that one cannot lay the blame for differential school performance entirely at the feet of students themselves. *Students behave rationally in terms of the environments created for them* (Ogby, 1974). Instead of exclusively focusing on individual students, McDermott and Gospodinoff (1979) suggest further study of the nature and characteristics of the environment in which individual behavior occurs. The emphasis ought to be on patterns of social relationship rather than patterns of individual behavior.

Boundary-Maintaining Structure of Schools McDermott's work (1974, 1977, 1978; McDermott and Gospodinoff, 1979) illustrates the manner in which the stratified process of public schooling serves what Singleton (1974) terms a *boundary-maintaining rather than boundary-breaking* structure between ranked social groups. If one required a mechanism for sorting each new generation of citizens into the advantaged and the disadvantaged, into the achieving and underachieving, one could not have done better than to invent the organizational patterns of public schooling. Although McDermott and Gospodinoff (1979) question the morality of what they describe, they also believe that classroom patterns of stratified social organization can be altered. More refined ethnographic study of actual classroom processes provides a basis for structural changes in the process of schooling. An implication is that early reading programs for children from subordinate subgroups will not be entirely effective within the stratified environment of the classroom. The structure of the process of schooling demands comparable attention and alteration.

Several studies by Ray C. Rist (1970, 1972) reflect a structural-functional approach to explaining disproportionate school success and failure. In a quite detailed

qualitative report, Rist (1970) found that student school success or failure involved peripheral, nonacademic factors such as mode of clothing and dress, hygiene, skin color, and speech pattern. Subordinate minority students possessing poor physical hygiene, having dark skin, of low family status, from low social interactional patterns, or characteristically using standard American English infrequently were evaluated by teachers as "slow learners." The academic potential and competence of students were significantly influenced by a pool of subjectively interpreted attributes and characteristics. Teacher evaluations influenced the interaction patterns forming stratified patterns of classroom social organization. Teacher/student interaction patterns influenced the transmission of competency-bearing information and the development of reading competence. Rist's (1970, 1972) argument is that differential interaction is at the base of differential school performance. Through the ethnographic study of classroom social organization in an inner city school, Rist (1970, 1972) illustrates the manner in which students homogeneous for the above-mentioned characteristics were spatially segregated into ranked reading groups.

Supporting the previously metnioned studies of McDermott (1975, 1977, 1978; McDermott and Gospodinoff, 1979) and Talbert (1970), Rist (1970) posits that literal spatial distance between teacher and student inhibits, while spatial contiguity strengthens, dyadic interaction. Spatial segregation resulted in differential interaction between the teacher and students in each ranked reading group. Belonging to a family on welfare was marked on a student's transcript. Children from welfare families were *not* placed at the "fast learner" table. Even before the school year began, being labeled "culturally deprived" and "disadvantaged" resulted in being placed at a reading table for "slow learners." As partially based on subjective evaluations (Burnett, 1976), the students were grouped into those who were expected to learn and those who were not expected to learn. Rist illustrates the significantly different teaching and learning activities occurring at each table. Within this framework, Rist says that students best approximating subjective teacher and school norms possess a better chance of being expected to succeed. Depending on their degree of "differentness," students are partially ascribed success and failure in the classroom and are accorded complementary statuses and roles. Paralleling Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), Rist concludes that students will not learn if they are not expected to learn. The social organization of the classroom reinforces the differential roles and statuses of those who are not expected to learn. Interestingly, Rist also found that students at the "fast" table mimicked the differential behavior of the teacher toward the "slow" students. The "fast" students came to hold the same subjective view as did the teacher toward the "slow" students. Rist concludes that 5-year-old children have already become aware of who is expected to succeed and who is expected to fail.

In a later article, Rist (1972) further developed this idea that the spatial organization of classrooms reinforces differential teacher/student interaction. Again, Rist employed naturalistic nonparticipation techniques to detect the manner in which, and on what basis, teacher/student interactions are differentiated. The spatial arrangement of classrooms, the manner in which students are seated vis-à-vis the teacher, influenced the quantity and quality of student/teacher interaction. The segmental structure of classrooms reinforced the potential for differentiated teaching and learning experiences. On the basis of both objective and subjective factors, students were grouped into

"fast" and "slow" learners. Importantly, students labeled "fast" learners received approximately two-thirds of the teacher's time during reading exercises. The teacher was seen to frequently touch and reinforce these students. The "fast" learners received approximately one-third less critical rebukes from the teacher. Spatially segregated at a single table, the "fast learners" were more accessible to the teacher. The "slow" learners were grouped at two other tables less accessible to the teacher. Furthermore, the blackboard on which assignments and drawings were placed was directly in front of the "fast" learner table.

The development of competence involves access to competency-bearing information as well as the opportunity for the practice and display of competent behaviors. As a reflex of the stratified social organization of these classrooms, the "slow" learners quite literally did not have the same opportunity as the "fast" learners to develop competence. The "slow" learners were further away from the teacher and did not receive the same quality or quantity of interaction as did the "fast" learners. Rist (1972) concludes that the "slow" learners did not develop "student" skills because they did not have equal access to the subtle cues, hints, reinforcements, and expressive gestures necessary to discern teacher expectation. The "slow" learners did not equally participate in the competency-learning dialectic. Presumably, they became frustrated and distracted, further reinforcing the pattern of decreasing interaction. Suggesting a caste-like pattern of stratification to the process of schooling, Rist illustrates the manner in which differential teaching and learning situations are part of the structure of the educational process. Noting that stratified societies mandate the enforced spatial distancing between subgroups, Rist concludes that a microlevel examination of classroom social organization reveals stratification in the educational process mirroring stratification in the wider society.

The ethnographic studies presented here illustrate the structural-functional relationship of educational processes to other subsystems, particularly networks of subgroup relationship, within society as a whole. The authors stress the manner in which the organization of classroom environments contributes to the development of differential teaching and learning experiences, the outcomes of which replicate and reinforce status and role patterns of subgroup relationship in the larger society. The notion that the development of competence is impeded by the organization of the teaching and learning environment is stressed. Relating microlevel classroom processes to macrolevel patterns in the national society, these studies adopt a structural point of view in accounting for disproportionate school failure on the part of children from subordinate social subgroups.

SUMMARY

This chapter argues that, in actuality, there are only two basic approaches to *conceptualizing* the problem of disproportionate school failure among children from subordinate subgroups: either there are significant problems with these children themselves, or there are significant problems with the schools they attend and the process of schooling they experience (Coleman, 1959; Baratz and Baratz, 1970; Burger, 1972; Ogbu, 1978). Predominantly, the developmental approach to school failure centers on an examination of individual children the remediation of whom presumably ensures their success

in school and, by implication, in later life (Bernstein, 1961; Hess and Shipman, 1965). The claim put forth here is that this conceptual stance neglects the nature, characteristics, and influence of both the school and the social environments mediating school success and failure.

A more structural approach to schools and schooling illustrates the manner in which both function to overtly and subtly reinforce predominant patterns of subgroup relationship in the wider society. The stratified structural relationship of subordinate and superordinate subgroups requires differential socialization for different social roles and statuses. Education is a subsystem functionally integrated with other aspects of society. Ethnographic studies of actual classroom processes reveal both the subtle and the manifest manner in which children from subordinate subgroups experience disproportionate school failure functionally relevant to maintaining the stratified structure of our society.

The remediation of disproportionate school success and failure requires intervention into the organization of the process of schooling *as well as* intervention for "readying" subordinate subgroup children for school. The stratified organization of schooling negates the impact of remediation of individual children. In the final analysis, the functional integration of education and society demands that meritocracy in the school and classroom reflect meritocracy within the wider society.

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